MULTI AWARD WINNING!

SCIENCE + ANIMALS + PUZZLES + PEOPLE + ARTS + PHOTOS + BOOKS + SPORTS + TOOTHPASTE SMOOTHIES

THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS & FACTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

ANIMALS
Super-smart wolf behavior in Canada
p10

BOOK CLUB
Fairy tale from Kate DiCamillo
p23

ARTS
SpongeBob film coming to theaters
p20

December 19, 2025 • Vol. 6, Issue 296 • $5.99

Making sense of the world

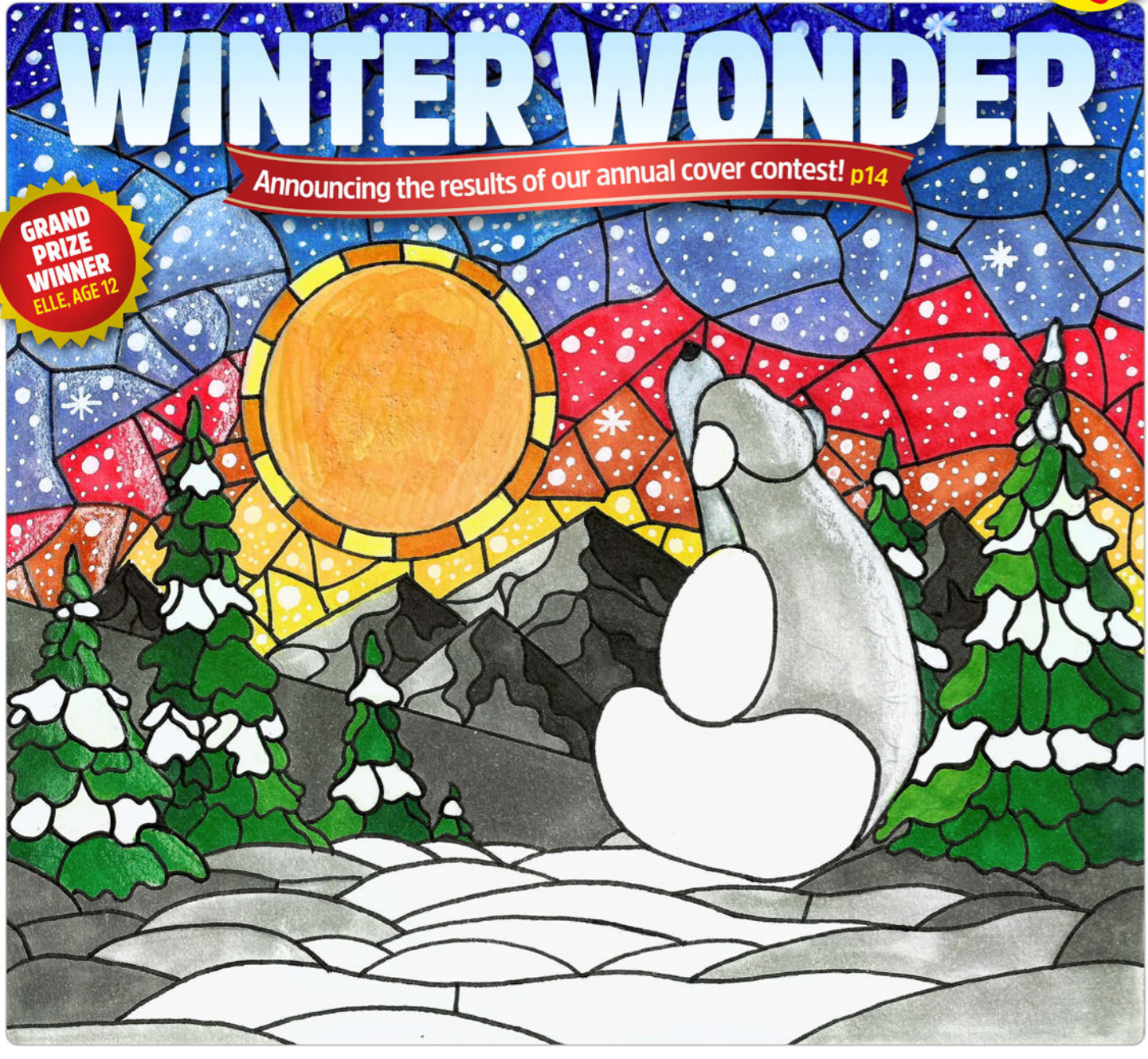
THE WEEK Junior

THE BEST MAGAZINE FOR CURIOUS KIDS

WINTER WONDER

Announcing the results of our annual cover contest! p14

GRAND PRIZE WINNER
ELLE, AGE 12



WINNERS! The US Women's National Team has won four FIFA Women's World Cups, in 1991, 1999, 2015, and 2019.

The FIFA event on December 5

Building a trophy

In March, Lego will release a special 2,842-piece set that can be put together to create a World Cup "trophy" (shown at right). The completed design is 14.5 inches tall—the same height as the real, solid-gold trophy—and will include a figure holding a tiny World Cup trophy of its own.

World Cup competition is set

The draw for the 2026 FIFA World Cup was held at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, on December 5. The process determines the matchups at the most important tournament in international men's soccer, which will take place in the summer of 2026.

What is the FIFA World Cup?

The World Cup brings together the best soccer teams from dozens of countries to compete for the global championship. It's held every four years in a host country or countries chosen by officials at FIFA, the organization that oversees soccer globally. The 2026 World Cup will be held in the US, Canada, and Mexico, making it the first to be hosted by three countries. Matches will take place in two cities in Canada, three in Mexico, and 11 in the US. The tournament will include 48 teams, the highest number ever. It will also be the second time the US has hosted the men's World Cup and the third time Mexico has hosted it.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup mascots

How does the draw work?

The draw sorted the 48 teams playing in the World Cup into 12 groups of four, from Group A through Group L. For the draw event, each team's name was written on a slip of paper that was placed inside a small ball. The balls were mixed up and then randomly chosen one at a time to determine which teams would be included in each group. For now, 42 teams have qualified for the tournament, and the remaining six will qualify in March. For that reason, six of the groups created at the draw have three teams and one open spot.

What happened at the draw?

Guests at the event included leaders of the three host countries: President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada, and President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico. North American sports stars Tom Brady, Shaquille O'Neal, Aaron Judge, and Wayne Gretzky also took part. The US was drawn into Group D with Paraguay, Australia, and a fourth team to be determined in March. Argentina, which won the 2022 World Cup, will play in Group J with Algeria, Austria, and Jordan. Curaçao, a small island in the Caribbean, qualified for the World Cup for the first time, and Haiti made it for the first time since 1974. Two of the world's best players will face each other in Group I: Kylian Mbappé from France and Erling Haaland from Norway. Also at the event, Gianni Infantino, the president of FIFA, awarded the first FIFA Peace Prize to Trump.

How did people react?

Fans cheered as they gathered at live watch parties throughout North America, including Kansas City, Missouri; Dallas, Texas; and Toronto, Canada; and at the official US Soccer watch party in Times Square in New York City. Coaches reflected on what lies ahead for their teams. "No matter which team we are playing, it's exciting. It's good for the island, it's good for the players," said Dick Advocaat, Curaçao's coach. "I think tonight must be crazy in Haiti," said that country's coach, Sebastian Migne. US coach Mauricio Pochettino said, "Now we start to live the World Cup."

What will happen next?

The tournament will open in Mexico City on June 11 with a match between Mexico and South Africa. The US will play its first match on June 12 against Paraguay in Inglewood, California. The group stage of the tournament will run through June 27, with the next stage starting the following day. The World Cup final will be held on July 29 in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Some tickets for early stages have gone on sale, with more to be released before competition begins next year.

ON THE COVER: ELLE; GETTY IMAGES (2); NINTENDO; PARAMOUNT PICTURES/VIACOM INTERNATIONAL INC.; COURTESY THE PUBLISHER

First insect now in Frozen Zoo

Scientists have added the first insect to the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Frozen Zoo in California. Researchers successfully collected cells of the critically endangered Lord Howe Island stick insect and added them to the biological bank, which is dedicated to protecting and preserving the world's wildlife.

The Lord Howe Island stick insect is a large, flightless invertebrate (animal without a backbone) that can be found only on a small group of islands in Australia. They were presumed extinct in the wild in 1930, but a tiny population was rediscovered in 2001. The Melbourne Zoo in Australia led the effort to preserve the species and partnered with the San Diego Zoo in 2012.

The Frozen Zoo, which was established in 1975, also holds samples from more than 1,300 species and subspecies of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and plants. The samples are frozen using a method called cryopreservation and stored at -320° F. Scientists could one day revive the cells to stop a species from going extinct.

A Lord Howe Island stick insect

Amanda Gorman

MAJOR MOMENT
In 2021, at age 22, Amanda Gorman became the youngest poet to read at a US Presidential inauguration.

Poet named UNICEF Ambassador

Author, activist, and poet Amanda Gorman, age 27, was named a UNICEF Ambassador on December 1. UNICEF is a global agency created by the United Nations (group of 193 nations working for peace) to protect children's rights and health. Gorman kicked off her new role by reading an original poem, "With This Bright Voice," at the 20th annual UNICEF Gala on December 2 in New York City.

Gorman grew up in Los Angeles, California, and had a speech impediment as a child. She began writing poetry as a way to express herself. In 2017, while she was a student at Harvard University, she was named the first National Youth Poet Laureate in the US. She gained international fame for reciting her poem "The Hill We Climb" at former President Joe Biden's inauguration in 2021, the same year she began volunteering at UNICEF. She has published three children's books, a book of poetry, and her inaugural poem in book form.

UNICEF works across the globe to improve health and nutrition, protect children from harm, ensure access to education, and offer emergency relief, among other goals. Gorman's role will be to boost public awareness on issues including children's safety, education, and development.

"Amanda has a singular talent for communicating the weight of a moment in a way that invites conversation and enacts change," said Michael Nyenhuis, head of UNICEF USA. "Working with UNICEF has shown me that when we choose to uplift children, we are choosing to uplift our shared future," Gorman said.

IT'S AN AMAZING WEEK FOR...

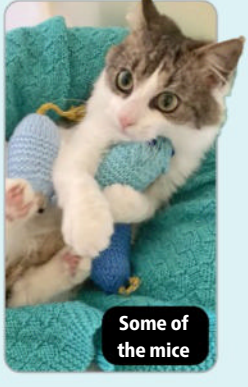
A FAVORITE TRADITION

The Rockefeller Center Christmas tree dazzled the crowd at a lighting ceremony on December 3 in New York City. At 75 feet tall, the Norwegian spruce has 50,000 lights and a 900-pound Swarovski star on top. "It's a dream come true," said an onlooker visiting from Ecuador. "I love Christmas."

The tree

KNITTING FOR KITTENS

Readers of *Woman's Weekly* magazine knit or crocheted 46,506 toy mice, which were donated to cat shelters across the UK—and set a world record for the most toy mice of their kind. The magazine's editor, Geoff Palmer, praised readers' generosity. "Every mouse was handmade with care," he said.



Some of the mice

A NEW HOME

Since 2000, a 12-foot-tall statue of Kermit the Frog has greeted visitors to the Jim Henson Company in Los Angeles, California. As the company, named for the creator of the Muppets, prepares to move, it has donated the statue to the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, Georgia, where it will "delight and inspire generations of dreamers," the center said.

The statue

UNICEF: KEN BOHN/SAN DIEGO ZOO WILDLIFE ALLIANCE; AP; WOMAN'S WEEKLY MAGAZINE/FORTUNE; GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (2); LEGO

DIVERSE HABITATS
Yosemite National Park supports more than 400 animal species, including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles.

A view of the Henness Ridge in California

Climber makes history

On November 23, Sasha DiGiulian (above) became the first woman to free-climb the longest route to the top of El Capitan, the 3,000-foot rock wall in Yosemite National Park. Free-climbing is when climbers ascend with their hands and feet, using ropes and gear only to protect against falling. She spent 23 days making the climb.

Land returned to Native American tribe

Hundreds of acres of land located along the western edge of Yosemite National Park in California has been returned to its original occupants, a Native American tribe that had been displaced from the area about 175 years ago.

What happened?

The nonprofit Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) transferred nearly 900 acres of land bordering Yosemite and the Sierra National Forest to the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. The land overlooks the Merced River and includes the Henness Ridge, a migration corridor for wildlife that is also the site of an ancestral trail. The PFT, which conserves forests in California and Oregon, acquired the property about 20 years ago to prevent vacation homes from being developed on it. The organization then helped secure funding for the land transfer and cared for the property, including planting about 125,000 native seedlings after a wildfire.

Why is this significant?

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation's ties to the land date back more than 6,000 years. In about 1850, white settlers who were searching for gold in the area began forcing tribal members out. Soon after, lumber companies that wanted to log the trees drove out even more members of the tribe. In 1969, the National Park Service, the agency that manages US land, evicted the remaining members. Although the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation is not recognized by the US government, its leaders hope that owning the land will help them achieve federal recognition.

How did people react?

Tribe members expressed relief at being able to return to their homeland. "Having this significant piece of our ancestral Yosemite land back will bring our community together," said Southern Sierra Miwuk tribal council chair and elder Sandra Chapman. PFT officials said they were happy to make the land transfer happen. "This is an extraordinarily fitting and positive outcome," said Laurie Wayburn, PFT's co-founder and president.

What will happen next?

With property ownership in place, tribal members said they have extensive plans for the land. They will restore native plants, rebuild the heavily logged forests, grow and harvest food and medicine, and conduct ancestral ceremonies there.

WORD OF THE WEEK

MUSEUM

In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, nine sister goddesses known as the Muses were believed to inspire all learning and creativity. A "museum," which is a center of culture and education, takes its name from the Greek *mouseion*, meaning "a place dedicated to the Muses."

THE WEEK IN HISTORY

December 21, 1937

Popular animated feature film premieres

On December 21, 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first full-length animated feature film produced in the US, premiered at a theater in Los Angeles, California. The event sold out, and more than 30,000 people waited outside the theater to be part of history. The Walt Disney Productions film took more than 2 million paintings, 750 artists, and three years to make.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

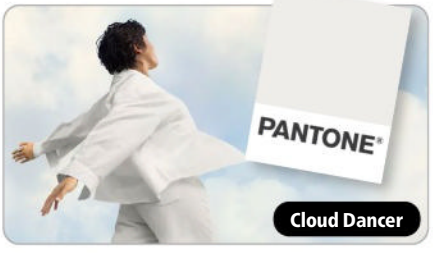
Athletes debut the gear.

Team USA uniforms revealed

The uniforms US athletes will wear for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2026 Milan Cortina Olympics have been unveiled by designer Ralph Lauren, who has outfitted Team USA for many years. A red, white, and blue sweater with cream trousers and a wool coat will be worn for the opening ceremony. The closing ceremony uniform features a puffer coat inspired by vintage skiwear (above). The Winter Olympics begin on February 6.

More given on GivingTuesday

People donated $4 billion to charities on GivingTuesday, December 2, an increase from the $3.6 billion given last year. The annual event, held on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, promotes generosity and is an important fundraiser for nonprofits. Volunteering on GivingTuesday also increased in 2025, with 11.1 million people donating their time, compared to 9.2 million in 2024.



Cloud Dancer

Color of the year for 2026

Pantone, the color consulting company, revealed Cloud Dancer as its color of the year for 2026. It said the hue, a shade of white, captures a "whisper of calm in a noisy world," symbolizing a fresh start and providing relaxation and focus. Since 1999, Pantone has researched emerging trends to make its color choice, which can influence fashion, design, and other industries in the year ahead.

WOW! Spotify had about 713 million monthly active users in 2025.

Spotify Wrapped music lists released

The world's largest music-streaming service, Spotify, released its 2025 Wrapped lists on December 3. Since 2016, Spotify has sent users their own personalized Wrapped lists, which summarize the songs and artists they have spent the most time listening to in the past year.

To compile the lists, Spotify counts every song a user has listened to for more than 30 seconds. Spotify also uses this data to create lists that reveal the most commonly streamed artists, albums, and songs in the US and around the world.

In the US, Taylor Swift was the most streamed artist for the third year in a row. Last year, she was also the most globally streamed artist, but this year Latin music star Bad Bunny overtook her with nearly 20 billion streams of his music. His album *DeBÍ TiRAR MÁS FOToS* was also the most streamed album worldwide.

Other artists captured top spots. *I'm the Problem,* from country star Morgan Wallen, was the most streamed album in the US. The most streamed song in the US was "luther (with SZA)" by rapper Kendrick Lamar, featuring R&B artist SZA. The second most streamed song in the US, "Die with a Smile" by Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars, was also the most streamed song globally.

A surprise leader on the 2025 Wrapped lists was the soundtrack to the popular Netflix animated film *KPop Demon Hunters*. It was the second most streamed album globally and the fourth most streamed album in the US. Its song "Golden" ranked sixth among the most streamed songs in the US and seventh worldwide.

Morgan Wallen

This year, Spotify introduced "listening age," which predicts a person's age based on when the music they streamed debuted. For example, someone who listens to music from the 1970s might have a listening age of 63, while a person who streamed hit songs from the 2010s might have a listening age of 14.

As part of Wrapped, many artists record video messages for their listeners. "I hope you have a wonderful holiday season," Swift told fans in her message. "I'm so grateful for you."

THE WEEK'S SILLIEST HEADLINE

"Escaped goat causes chaos in Detroit" ***UPI***

GETTY IMAGES (7); RALPH LAUREN; PANTONE; ON LEFT PAGE: PACIFIC FOREST TRUST; PABLO DURANA; ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES

Around the world

Rafael Ithier

Bayamón, Puerto Rico
Musician is remembered

Rafael Ithier, a famous Puerto Rican musician, died on December 6 at age 99. Ithier founded the salsa band El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, one of the island's most successful musical groups. Born in the city of San Juan, he learned guitar at age 10 and later picked up the piano, double bass, and Cuban tres. He also composed music. "His legacy transcends borders and lives on through generations," said Governor Jenniffer González Colón.

Models on a boat

Dakar, Senegal
Fashion show on the ocean

Models held onto ropes to steady themselves during Dakar Fashion Week, which took place at sea. Designer Adama Paris started Dakar Fashion Week in 2002 to shine a spotlight on African fashion. For its 23rd edition, brightly painted fishing boats on Senegal's Atlantic coast were turned into floating catwalks. More than 30 designers from Senegal, Ghana, Congo, Morocco, and the Ivory Coast showcased their styles.

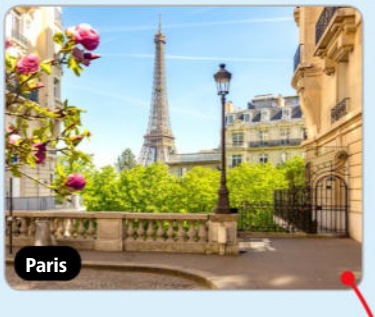
The trees

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Palm trees finally bloom

Talipot palm trees have bloomed for the first and last time in Flamengo Park, where they were planted 40 to 80 years ago. Native to India and Sri Lanka, talipots were introduced to Brazil by landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. The trees can grow up to 98 feet tall and flower only once in their lives. Each tree produces about 25 million flowers when it finally blossoms.

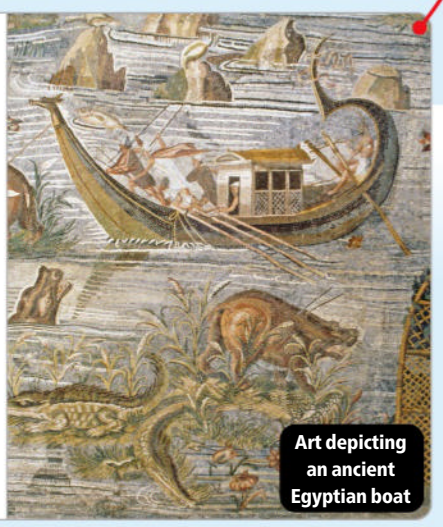
Paris, France
City ranked most attractive

Paris was named the world's most attractive city for a fifth time. The Top 100 City Destinations Index analyzed tourism, health, sustainability, safety, and other factors. Paris was recognized for welcoming more than 18 million visitors and reopening Notre-Dame Cathedral. Other top cities included Madrid, Spain; Tokyo, Japan; and Rome and Milan in Italy.


Paris

Alexandria, Egypt
Ancient boat found

Archaeologists think they have discovered the remains of an ancient Egyptian pleasure boat off the coast of Alexandria. The 115-foot craft dates to the first century and was found near the sunken island of Antirhodos. Experts believe royals used it for trips that involved music and dancing. People also may have traveled on it during festivals or ceremonies. It's the first time a boat like this has been found in Egypt.


Art depicting an ancient Egyptian boat

ALAMY (3); GETTY IMAGES (6); SHUTTERSTOCK

Around the world

Young recruits

Germany
Military service law passed

In an effort to boost Germany's defenses, lawmakers approved a voluntary military service law. Starting in January, all 18-year-olds will be sent a form asking if they are willing to join the armed forces. Men must fill it out, while women can choose not to. On December 5, students held a nationwide protest against the plan.

A protest in the capital

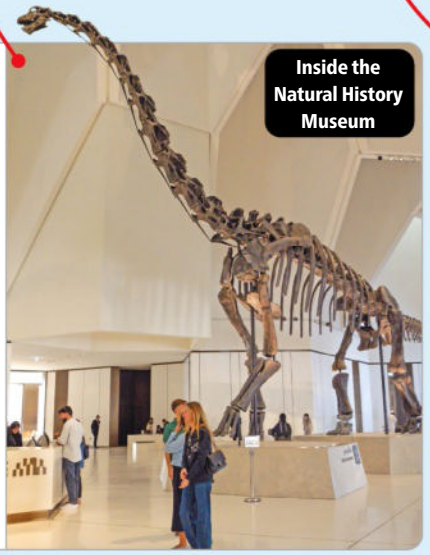
Bulgaria
Budget proposal overturned

Bulgaria's government scrapped its 2026 budget after huge demonstrations took place on December 1. The plan would have required people to pay more money in taxes and other contributions so the government can spend more. Across the country, tens of thousands of people rallied against the proposal and called for politicians to change it or step down. The next day, officials withdrew the budget plan.

Children's accounts must be removed.

Australia
Social media ban takes effect

The world's first ban on social media for children under age 16 took effect on December 10. Australia's new law aims to protect children from harmful content. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat must take steps to stop underage users from having accounts, but children can still access a "kid-friendly" version of YouTube. While some young Australians support the ban, 70% oppose it and 72% say it won't work.


Inside the Natural History Museum

Abu Dhabi, UAE
Museums open

Two new museums have opened in Abu Dhabi. After 15 years of construction, Zayed National Museum began welcoming visitors on December 3. With five towers shaped like falcon wings, it celebrates the history and culture of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, which opened late last month, features a 7-billion-year-old meteorite (space rock) and one of the world's best-preserved Tyrannosaurus rex fossils.

The egg

Auckland, New Zealand
Swallowed jewelry recovered

Police recovered a Fabergé egg pendant worth about $19,300 from a man who was accused of stealing it from a store by swallowing it. Made by the jeweler Fabergé, the gold object was covered in green enamel and precious stones. It passed through the man's digestive system over six days, and officers found it still attached to its gold chain with the price tag intact.

Is hot chocolate better than chocolate milk?

It's a warm treat on cold days, but many people prefer the year-round version.

What you need to know

- **Many instant chocolate beverages can be enjoyed hot or cold.**
- **Hershey first sold its chocolate syrup in US grocery stores in 1928 and its cocoa beverage powder in 1943. The Nestlé Quik chocolate milk powder was introduced in 1948.**
- **Recent studies have shown that up to 75% of students choose chocolate milk during school lunches.**
- **Popular variations of hot chocolate include peppermint, orange, and spicy Mexican hot chocolate.**

ANCIENT BEVERAGE
About 2,500 years ago, the Maya people made a chocolate drink consisting of ground-up cacao seeds, water, and spices.

GETTY IMAGES

There's no arguing that chocolate drinks are popular, whether they're hot or cold. In one survey, 34% of Americans named hot chocolate as their favorite holiday beverage, and plenty of people say the season would feel incomplete without the iconic winter treat. Many others, however, prefer a refreshing drink of chocolate milk, which can be enjoyed straight from the refrigerator no matter what time of year it is. One in three adults have said they would drink chocolate milk every day if they had the choice. Three quarters of US schoolchildren agree and drink it at lunch. What do you think? Is hot chocolate better than chocolate milk?

Yes—it's a cold-weather classic

Hot chocolate is a tell-tale sign that winter and all the festivities that come along with it are here. Whether you're craving a happy holiday drink or a classic cold-weather beverage, hot chocolate fits the bill. As the temperature drops, it can warm both your hands and your stomach. And a cup of hot cocoa is the perfect toasty drink after a busy day of sledding, ice skating, or catching snowflakes on your tongue. Plus, hot chocolate has many flavor variations, like peppermint and cinnamon, and can also be made with tasty toppings like whipped cream and marshmallows. You can't do that with chocolate milk.

No—it's always time for chocolate milk

While hot chocolate may be a great winter treat, chocolate milk is a staple all year long. You can easily find chocolate milk at grocery stores, both in family-sized cartons and smaller portions you can drink on the go. Chocolate milk is also easy to make at home simply by putting powder or syrup in a cold glass of milk. There's no need to wait around while your milk heats up. And chocolate milk is a classic part of school lunch, adding something special to kids' trays across the US. It also contains much less sugar than hot chocolate topped with marshmallows or whipped cream.

YES Three reasons hot chocolate is better than chocolate milk

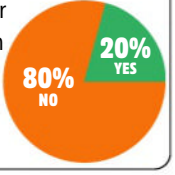
1. **Hot chocolate is a timeless, joyous symbol of chilly weather and winter holidays.**
2. **When you've been outside playing in cold weather, hot chocolate is the perfect drink to warm you up.**
3. **You can add many different delicious toppings to hot cocoa, like whipped cream, marshmallows, and spices.**

NO Three reasons hot chocolate is not better than chocolate milk

1. **Chocolate milk is a delicious drink year-round, while hot chocolate is really best for cold days.**
2. **Chocolate milk can be bought pre-made, or you can make it quickly and easily without heating up anything.**
3. **Chocolate milk is a school lunch classic enjoyed by children across the US.**

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if we should stop having classroom pets. Most of you want your slinky, scaly, or furry friends in school: 80% said no, and 20% said yes.



What do you think?

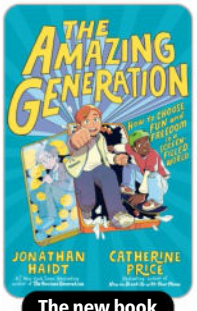
Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote YES if you think hot chocolate is better than chocolate milk and NO if you think it isn't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.

Advocating for play

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt is a champion for screen-free childhoods.

Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist, which means he studies how people think, behave, and relate to one another. Last year, Haidt wrote a best-selling book called *The Anxious Generation*. It explores how smartphones and social media are reshaping childhood and helps adults understand the challenges kids face. With co-author Catherine Price, he has now released an adaptation titled *The Amazing Generation* for ages 9 to 12.



The new book

Growing up in Westchester County, New York, Haidt rode bikes with friends, explored the woods, and built forts from construction scraps. He went on to study psychology at Yale University and earned a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. Haidt now teaches psychology and business ethics at New York University (NYU).

About 10 years ago, while at NYU, Haidt noticed more students feeling anxious and depressed. He began researching why and found that kids today spend much less time playing freely. "They're not as confident—they're in defend mode rather than discover mode," Haidt told *The Week Junior*. This inspired him to write *The Anxious Generation*, which spent more than a year on best-seller lists and inspired social media bans in Australia.

The Amazing Generation brings *The Anxious Generation* to life for kids. It combines a graphic novel format with practical information and hands-on activities to promote real-world play and healthy tech habits. Haidt hopes the book inspires readers to be creative. "Take chances, go somewhere outdoors, or try something new with a friend," he said.

Jonathan Haidt

READY TO UNPLUG
About 53% of Americans say they want to cut down on how often they use their phone.

A top acting honor

Actress Helen Mirren will receive the 2026 Cecil B. DeMille Award at the Golden Globe Awards on January 11. The honor recognizes a person's lifetime achievements. In a career spanning more than 50 years, Mirren has earned acclaim for her versatile roles, from Queen Elizabeth II to the narrator in *Barbie*. She recently played a Holocaust survivor in the 2024 adaptation of R.J. Palacio's *White Bird: A Wonder Story*. Golden Globe Awards president Helen Hoehne said Mirren's work continues "to inspire generations."

Helen Mirren

Snoop Dogg

Making a TV return

Hip-hop icon Snoop Dogg will return to NBC's Olympics coverage as a special correspondent for the Milan-Cortina Winter Games in Italy, beginning on February 6. Snoop became a fan favorite at the 2024 Paris Olympics with his cool commentary and viral moments, like dancing with gymnasts. He will once again celebrate with athletes, explore the host city, and reunite with sports journalist Mike Tirico for "Snoop's Greatest Hits" segments. NBC called him their "Ambassador of Happiness." Snoop said, "I'm all about sports and unifying while bringing the fun."

OVERHEARD

"Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do anything, because you can—you just find your way to do it. It's not always easy, but it is possible."

Wicked: For Good star Cynthia Erivo on finding success and chasing her performing arts dreams

SHUTTERSTOCK; BOOK: COURTESY OF PUBLISHER; GETTY IMAGES (3)

A gray wolf

The lives of sea wolves

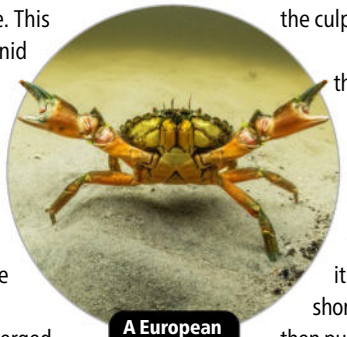
A subspecies of gray wolves on the west coast of Canada and Alaska has been nicknamed "sea wolves" because of their unusual lifestyle. These semi-aquatic wolves swim from island to island in the northern Pacific Ocean, feasting on salmon, seals, otters, and beached whales.

Sea wolves

Wolf behavior stuns scientists

Experts have known for many years that wolves are intelligent animals. But one wolf in Canada's British Columbia has surprised scientists by breaking open a human-made trap to feast on the food inside. This may be the first time a wild canid (a group that includes foxes, wolves, and jackals) has been observed using tools.

In 2021, members of the Heiltsuk Nation started laying out underwater traps near the coast to catch invasive European green crabs. After a couple of years, a problem emerged. When people went to check on the traps, many had been damaged or destroyed and the bait inside (typically herring or sea lion meat) was gone. They suspected this was the work of bears, wolves, seals, or sea otters.


A European green crab

To solve the mystery, they set up a camera to monitor the area. This footage revealed the culprit—a lone female gray wolf.

The wolf's raid took less than three minutes. The trap was attached by a rope to a red-and-white buoy that floated on top of the water. The wolf grabbed the buoy with her teeth and dragged it from the deep water to the shore. Setting the buoy down, she then pulled the rope until the trap came out of the water. Once the wolf got hold of the trap, she tore its netting to pull out the plastic cup of bait. She ate the meat and left.

This discovery has sparked debate among experts. Researchers Kyle Artelle and Paul Paquet, who published the finding, say it's the first time a wolf has been observed using a tool. Others, however, think that pulling the rope to get food from the trap is not really tool use. Some experts define a tool as an object that an animal has crafted or adapted for the purpose of achieving a goal. In this case, the rope was created and placed there by humans—not by the wolf herself.

Still, most experts agree that the wolf's behavior was an impressive example of high-level problem-solving skills. "It shows how we have likely only scratched the surface of what the other species we share this world with can do, what and how they think, and what they can teach us," Artelle told Live Science.

PLACE OF THE WEEK

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, Florida

The Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge in Florida is an unspoiled, natural spring habitat located near the Gulf Coast. It is the only refuge dedicated to protecting the threatened Florida manatee. The refuge was established in 1983 as a haven for the large marine mammals, which are a subspecies of the West Indies manatee. The Crystal River flows into Kings Bay, where seven additional US sanctuaries are in place to safeguard the animals. About 600 manatees migrate to Kings Bay and the refuge each winter from other parts of the Florida coast.

A Florida manatee

LONG DROP
Giraffes give birth to their calves standing up, causing newborn calves to fall about six feet to the ground.

A giraffe drinking water

How long legs help giraffes' hearts

Giraffes are known for their impressive height, which allows them to reach leaves on the tops of acacia trees in Africa. Their long necks are obviously helpful, but researchers recently found that giraffes' legs may help them even more.

Giraffes have high blood pressure because their hearts need to work hard to pump blood up through their long necks to their brains. In fact, the heart of a resting giraffe uses more energy than the entire body of a resting human. Researchers guessed that having long legs means a giraffe's neck doesn't need to be quite as long, enabling the animal's heart to use less energy to pump blood to the brain.

To test this, the team compared giraffes to an imaginary "elaffe," a cross between a giraffe and an eland antelope. The elaffe had shorter legs and a longer neck. That animal, they found, would spend 21% of its energy powering its heart, while giraffes spend 16%.

Needing less energy could be an advantage, as food can be scarce in the African savanna. But long legs also have drawbacks. To bend down to drink, giraffes' legs must be wide apart, making it hard to escape quickly if predators appear.

Animal of the week: Elephant shrew

Hertfordshire Zoo in the UK has welcomed a pair of black and rufous sengi, also known as elephant shrews. These rare mammals have long, flexible noses that resemble an elephant's trunk and help them sniff out insects and small prey.

- **LIFESPAN:** 4 years in the wild, 10 in human care
- **HABITAT:** Forests and shrublands in Africa
- **SIZE:** 9 to 12 inches long, about 1 pound
- **DIET:** Mainly insects, some fruit and seeds
- **FUN FACT:** Although they're small, some elephant shrews can run up to 18 miles per hour.

Good week / Bad week

Spiny-tailed iguanas
Mexican officials were planning to eliminate spiny-tailed iguanas from Clarion Island, believing the species was non-native. But new evidence shows that the iguanas have lived there for half a million years—longer than humans.

Red oaks
A pest that has killed millions of red oak trees in California was recently found in a plant nursery in Minnesota. Experts say this "sudden oak death" disease has been moving east across North America, but so far it hasn't spread in the midwestern US.

Ask an expert: "Why do birds migrate?"

Ray, 11, Georgia

Cody Hickman
Avian care expert,
Brookfield Zoo Chicago

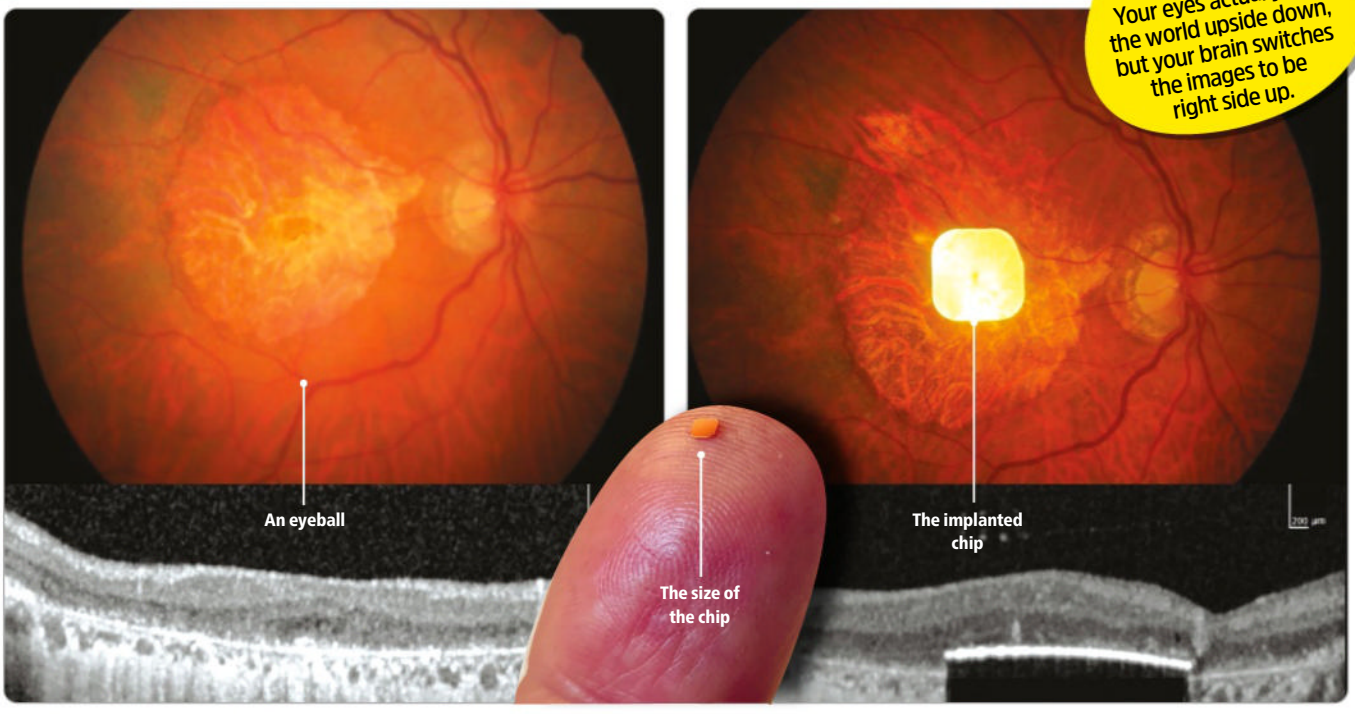
Birds migrate to find food and safe places to raise their young. When it gets cold, food becomes scarce, so birds fly to warmer locations with plenty to eat. Changes in daylight signal when it's time to begin their journey. Some birds travel thousands of miles to their preferred spots!

Arctic terns migrate up to 59,650 miles.

Do you have a question for an animal expert? Send it to *hello@theweekjunior.com*. Find out more about Brookfield Zoo Chicago at brookfieldzoo.org.

GETTY IMAGES (4); ALAMY; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (3); ALAMY; TIM IRVIN

FLIP OUT
Your eyes actually see the world upside down, but your brain switches the images to be right side up.



Tiny chip helps blind patients see

In a major breakthrough, scientists are helping people with impaired vision see again by inserting tiny wireless electronic chips into the backs of their eyes. The chips, called Prima implants, are two millimeters wide, which is about as thick as a grain of rice.

A trial program involved 38 patients who suffer from an eye condition called age-related macular degeneration (AMD). It mostly affects older people and makes the center of their vision look blurry. About 20 million people in the US have AMD, and there is currently no cure.

The glasses

The trial took place at 17 hospitals in Europe. All the patients had a type of AMD called "dry AMD." The disease damages cells at the back of the eye that detect light. Those light-sensitive cells transform light into electrical signals, which tell the brain what the eyes are seeing. When the cells are damaged or dead, people can't see properly.

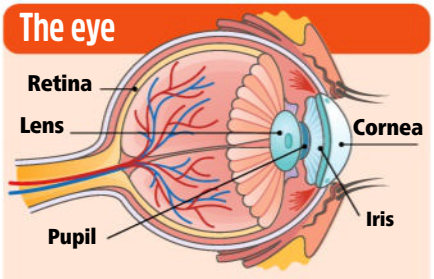
The tiny "bionic" chips can give people back some sight. (Bionic means a human-made object that acts as a body part.) Patients wear a pair of glasses with a built-in video camera and a pocket-sized black box that processes the data. When a patient wearing the glasses looks at something, like a book, the camera in the glasses captures an image. It sends this data to the black box, which makes the image clearer and sends it back to the glasses.

Using infrared signals (the same type of light a remote control uses to switch on the TV), the glasses project the image to the chip, which sits underneath the patient's retina (see box at right). The chip converts the image into electrical signals, which are sent to the brain.

The patient then needs time to train their brain to understand the images they see. Although the images appear only in black and white, the implant has nevertheless made a huge difference to many of the patients who received it.

Sheila Irvine, age 70, was one of the trial participants. "I was an avid bookworm, and I wanted that back," said Irvine, who was technically considered blind before the trial. After spending many hours training herself to use the new chip and glasses, she can now read books and do crossword puzzles. "It is amazing," she said of the results. "I am one happy bunny."

The eye



Cornea: The curved, see-through layer covers the front of the eyeball. Light hits the cornea, which bends and focuses the light as it enters the eye.

Iris: The colored ring contains muscles that control the size of the pupil.

Pupil: The black spot in the center of the eye gets bigger and smaller to control the amount of light that enters.

Lens: The transparent lens sits inside the eyeball and focuses light so it hits the wall at the back of the eye. The cornea provides about 70% of the eye's focus, and the lens contributes about 30%.

Retina: This thin layer of tissue lines the back of the eye and converts light into an electrical signal that goes to the brain via the optic nerve.

New map explores the Roman Empire

At its peak, the Roman Empire (8th century BCE to 476 CE) spread across land that makes up 50 different countries today. One source of the empire's power was its extensive network of roads. Recently, researchers created a map of the roads called Itiner-e.

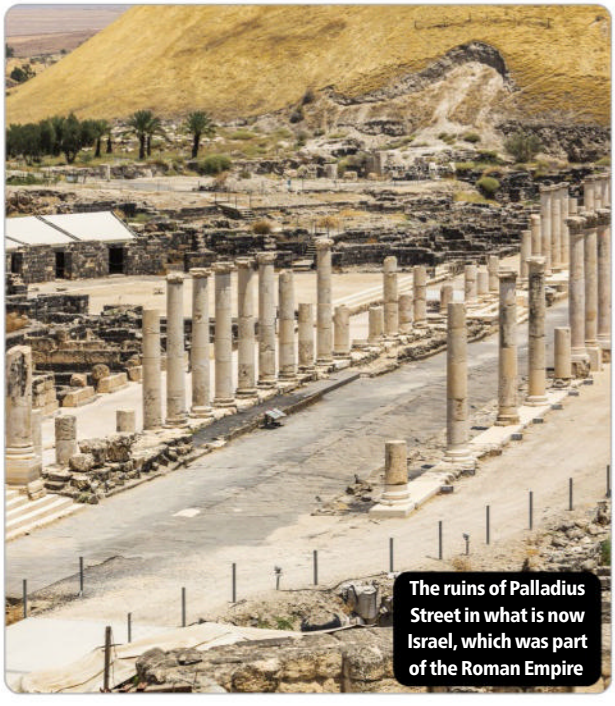
The map shows the empire as it was in about 150 BCE, when it had about 100 million people. Centered in what is now Rome, Italy, the empire stretched from Britain through western Europe to parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Itiner-e was made using historical records, field surveys, and satellite imagery. It includes more than 185,000 miles of ancient roads, including about 62,000 previously unknown miles.

ROAD TRIP
One of the oldest and busiest roads in ancient Rome, called the Appian Way, can still be walked on today.

Researchers were able to document the precise locations of about 3% of the roads on the map and used the available information to estimate the rest. The map also shows a small number of "hypothetical" roads that were likely to exist but are not well documented in existing research material. Users can click on individual roads in the Itiner-e platform to see how confident the researchers are in the road's placement.

Experts will continue to update Itiner-e as new roads are discovered. Knowing what the full network of roads looked like will help researchers better understand how people, goods, and even diseases moved throughout the ancient empire.


The ruins of Palladius Street in what is now Israel, which was part of the Roman Empire

The decorative spear

Medieval spears found in lake

Underwater archaeologists found four spearheads from the late 10th and early 11th centuries in Lake Lednica in Poland. One (shown above) was plated with gold, silver, bronze, and other valuable metals and decorated with geometric and spiral designs. It was likely a symbol of power rather than a weapon.

The smallest of the four artifacts has an antler ring on its tip and is attached to a wooden handle that is 6.5 feet long. Another is shaped like a willow leaf, which was common in Europe at the time. A welded steel spearhead would have been strong and useful for battle.

Researchers will study the objects' chemical composition and determine how they were forged, which could indicate whether they were produced locally or came from Scandinavia or Russia. The ancient objects are among more than 200 spearheads, swords, and axes pulled from Lake Lednica in the past 40 years.

AMAZING INVENTION

Fabric made from chicken feathers

Kertex fibers

Americans eat about 32.5 billion pounds of chicken per year, and most of the birds' feathers get thrown away. Now scientists in Hawaii are using them to create a sustainable fabric called Kertex that can be used for clothing, upholstery, and other purposes.

Chicken feathers contain keratin—a natural substance that makes them strong. Kertex, which has the look and feel of wool but is sturdier and stretchier, takes advantage of that strength. Its designers said feathers from two chickens can make one sweater.

GETTY IMAGES; MATEUSZ POPEK; OCEANIT; ON THE LEFT PAGE: SCIENCE CORPORATION (3); SHUTTERSTOCK

Winning artwork!

For our sixth annual Winter Cover Contest, we invited readers to create a cover for the magazine that celebrates the season along with the spirit of *The Week Junior*. We received more than 2,000 submissions and were impressed by the skill and imagination that went into all of them.

The contest was judged by Editorial Director Andrea Barbalich, Creative Director Dean Abatemarco, and renowned children's book creators Vanessa Brantley-Newton, Whitney Gardner, and Chris Raschka. Brantley-Newton is a best-selling author and illustrator whose titles include *Becoming Vanessa*. Gardner is an award-winning graphic novelist whose most recent book is *Free Piano (Not Haunted)*. Raschka, a Caldecott Medal winner, has illustrated more than 50 books for children, including his latest project, *I Hear the Snow, I Smell the Sea*.

Given the high quality of the contest entries, it was very difficult to narrow them to the 10 finalists shown here and on the next spread. In the end, it was Elle's entry, *Stained Glass Winter Scene*, that earned the grand prize.

We offer our warmest congratulations to Elle, runners-up Seth and Victoria, all the finalists, and every young artist who entered. "I'm always impressed by the creativity that goes into the contest submissions, and this year was no exception," Abatemarco said. "Our readers should be very proud of their work, and I hope they keep using art to express themselves."

"This image mimics traditional stained glass. The composition and colors are so very vivid and enchanting! The entire work is rendered beautifully. It is telling its own story—even the polar bear loves looking at the night stars. The overall effect is comforting and sweet."
—Vanessa Brantley-Newton

RUNNER-UP
SETH
Age 10

"The artist captured winter charm with incredible skill and personality. The two birds look ready to brave a frosty morning. Every feather, berry, and leaf is drawn with detail and care, creating a scene that practically lets you feel the chill in the air."
—Whitney Gardner

RUNNER-UP
VICTORIA
Age 11

"The watercolor technique in this artwork is extremely well done, resulting in a striking and clear image of the penguins. The piece establishes a mood of stillness, a caring family, and childhood happiness. Perfect!"
—Chris Raschka

Winter Cover Contest

FINALIST
COLE
Age 9

FINALIST
ELLIE
Age 11

FINALIST
ELEANORA
Age 12

Winter Cover Contest

BIG STARS
Lionel Messi, Sergio Busquets, and Rodrigo De Paul of Inter Miami are the only MLS players who have won the MLS Cup and a World Cup.

Inter Miami celebrating

A changing league

MLS was founded in 1996 with 10 clubs. It has grown to 30 clubs today, and the players come from around 80 different countries. In 2027, the league will change from a schedule that runs from spring to fall into one that begins in the summer and ends the following spring.

Inter Miami wins MLS championship

On December 6, the 2025 MLS (Major League Soccer) Cup championship was played between Inter Miami CF and the Vancouver Whitecaps at Inter Miami's home field, Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It was an exciting matchup between two teams with legendary stars: Lionel Messi, an Argentinian forward for Miami, and Thomas Müller, a German forward who plays for Vancouver. Both teams hoped to win their first MLS Cup, which Miami clinched with a 3–1 victory.

Lionel Messi

Miami and Vancouver made the MLS Cup playoffs after strong regular seasons. Miami was the third seed (ranking) in the Eastern Conference and earned a shot at the title by defeating fifth-seeded New York City FC, 5–1, in the conference final. Tadeo Allende of Miami scored a hat trick (three goals) in the match. Meanwhile, Vancouver finished the regular season in second place in the Western Conference. In their conference final, they beat the top seed, San Diego FC, a team that was new this year, by a score of 3–1.

In the championship match, Miami took an early lead after an own goal by Vancouver in the eighth minute. The Whitecaps generated several scoring chances during the first half but were unable to get any shots past Miami goalkeeper Rocco Ríos Novo. Fifteen minutes into the second half, Ríos Novo deflected a strike by Vancouver's Ali Ahmed, but the ball trickled into the back of the net, bringing the score to a tie.

Ten minutes later, Messi played a beautiful pass to teammate Rodrigo De Paul, who was behind the Vancouver defense and buried a shot into the bottom left corner to give his team the lead. In the final moments of the match, Messi had another assist as he found Allende streaking toward the goal. Allende scored to seal the win.

Inter Miami had a record-breaking 20 goals across their six postseason matches. Messi himself set an MLS playoff record with 15 goal contributions (six goals, nine assists). Allende had nine goals overall, another postseason record.

Messi was named the 2025 MLS Cup Most Valuable Player. In October, he won the MLS Golden Boot, the award for the top scorer in the regular season. He is expected to win the overall MLS MVP award, which would make him the first player to earn that title in back-to-back seasons.

THIS WEEK'S WINNERS...

FIGURE SKATING

On December 6, four US skaters won gold at the Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final. Madison Chock and Evan Bates were the ice dancing champions, and Alysa Liu placed first in women's skating. The men's winner was Ilia Malinin. He did seven quadruple jumps in his free skate and landed them all cleanly, something no one has ever done in one program. As a result, he set a new world record free skate score.

Alysa Liu

WATER POLO

In the NCAA championship match on December 5, UCLA beat USC, 11–10, thanks to a last-second goal from Frederico Jucá Carsalade. This is UCLA's second straight national championship.

AUTO RACING

British driver Lando Norris won his first Formula 1 Drivers' Championship on December 7. He placed third at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix that day but earned enough points to beat Max Verstappen in the overall drivers' standings.

Flau'jae Johnson (right)

WOW! LSU coach Kim Mulkey was the first person ever to win a national championship as a player, an assistant, and a head coach.

LSU hoops team sets record

It's early in the college basketball season, but one women's team has attracted attention for its superb offensive performances. LSU (Louisiana State University), ranked fifth in the US, set an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) record by scoring at least 100 points in eight straight games to start their season. When *The Week Junior* went to press on December 9, LSU were 10–0.

One big reason for the team's hot start is their star guard, senior Flau'jae Johnson. She had the chance to go pro after last season but chose to return to LSU. She is expected to be a first-round pick in next year's WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) draft. She is leading LSU with an average of 17.1 points per game.

So far, most of LSU's games this season have come against modest competition, but on December 4, the team had its toughest test yet when they played Duke University. Early on, LSU trailed by 14 points, but they came back, were ahead at halftime, and then won, 93–77. Johnson led all scorers with 18 points. On December 7, LSU beat the University of New Orleans, 126–62, their ninth 100+ point game and 10th victory so far.

Several other women's basketball teams are also off to strong starts. The defending NCAA champions, UConn (University of Connecticut), are currently ranked number one in the country and have a 9–0 record heading into a game against 16th-ranked USC on December 13. UConn and LSU are joined in the top five by the University of Texas, who are 10–0, along with the University of South Carolina and UCLA (the University of California, Los Angeles).

COACH OF THE WEEK

Coach's Name: **Laurel Reid**

Team: **NOVA Swim**

"Coach Laurel is the BEST! She is hilarious and always makes swim practice fun. She's helped me with all of my strokes, and they look much better. Her butterfly drills have improved my stroke and now I'm not afraid to race it. She makes our whole team feel awesome and comfortable, even at big meets. She won't be my coach forever, so I want her to know that I will always remember her and I'll take all that I have learned from her with me." Brooke, 9, Virginia

To nominate a Coach of the Week, send your coach's name, photo, sport, and team to *hello@theweekjunior.com.* Include your name, age, state, and a few reasons why your coach is great.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

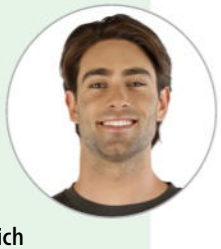
These US athletes have qualified or are hoping to qualify for the upcoming Winter Olympics or Paralympics in Italy. Here are some thoughts they shared with The Week Junior *about their sports.*

Noah Elliott AGE: 28
SPORT: PARA SNOWBOARDING

"My favorite thing about snowboarding is the feeling it gives you—that freedom, that dance with the board, that ride."

Mystique Ro AGE: 31
SPORT: SKELETON

"We slide headfirst on our bellies and go about 80 miles an hour. You definitely have to know how to have body position and body control."



Alex Hall AGE: 27
SPORT: FREESKI

"There are very few rules in freeski, so you get to do it a lot of different ways. In addition to the competitive side of things, there's also another side to our sport, which involves making videos and traveling around the world trying your hardest tricks on certain jumps and rails."

Kendall Gretsch AGE: 33
SPORT: PARA NORDIC SKIING

"Being in the mountains and outside in general is my favorite thing about skiing. It's brought me to so many places I'd never have gone to if I wasn't doing this sport."

Jason Brown AGE: 30
SPORT: FIGURE SKATING

"I love the artistic element of figure skating and its blend of artistry and athleticism. I can be different characters and express myself in many ways while continuing to push myself toward different athletic goals."

GETTY IMAGES (6); ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (3); MLS

FUN FACT
Before becoming an animator, *SpongeBob SquarePants* creator Stephen Hillenburg was a marine science teacher.

The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants

A new *SpongeBob* adventure

The beloved character from Bikini Bottom and his friends are starring in a new animated film.

A new film featuring characters from the popular Nickelodeon series *SpongeBob SquarePants* is heading to theaters. *The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants* opens on December 19 and stars the original voice cast along with some well-known new additions, including a major music star.

SpongeBob SquarePants premiered on TV in 1999 and is the longest-running animated children's show. There have been 16 seasons and three feature films, plus spin-off shows and video games. The series is set in the underwater city of Bikini Bottom, where SpongeBob, whose best friend is Patrick Star, works at the Krusty Krab alongside his neighbor Squidward and their boss, Mr. Krabs.

Ice Spice

Search for SquarePants is directed by Derek Drymon, who has been a co-writer on the series since its early days. He told *The Week Junior* that he believes SpongeBob's "naive, innocent, kid-like attitude" is a big part of his lasting appeal. "When we created the show, we were always thinking about making SpongeBob relatable to what kids are going through—fitting in, making friends, feeling insecure, or like you're a square peg in a round hole," he said.

In the new film, SpongeBob wants to prove his bravery to Mr. Krabs, so he and Patrick join a ghost pirate, the Flying Dutchman, on a daring journey. Drymon said the Flying Dutchman appeared early in the series as a mysterious figure and is now the film's villain. He is voiced by Mark Hamill, the actor who plays Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* films.

Another celebrity who has a part in the film is rapper Ice Spice. She is making her voice-acting debut and plays a character at an amusement park. "I grew up watching *SpongeBob*. I am a huge fan," she said in a video about the film. She said the work was "a challenge, but it was really fun, new, and different." For the film's soundtrack, she wrote and performed an original song, "Big Guy," which is about confidence and SpongeBob's new attitude.

Drymon called the film a "big pirating adventure" and said it was made so audiences in a theater can laugh together. Mixed into the comedy are lessons that SpongeBob, Patrick, and Mr. Krabs learn about friendship. "We all see ourselves as misunderstood and want to belong," Drymon said. "Friends make your life better, they help you, and you need to appreciate them."

Coming soon: *Anaconda*

Jack Black from *A Minecraft Movie* (above right) is starring in a new comedy-adventure with Paul Rudd (above left). *Anaconda* (PG-13), out December 25, is about adult friends who try to remake a snake movie they loved as kids.

There are two enormous snakes in the film, which were created by model-making experts. Director and co-writer Tom Gormican told *The Week Junior* the smaller snake was "a puppet that was 10% larger than the largest anaconda on record."

The movie snakes were designed to mimic how actual snakes move and attack, but the model makers strayed from real life in other ways. Real anacondas are "kind of goofy looking," Gormican said. To make a scarier snake, "we modified the head and teeth," he said. "It's a bit more monstrous."

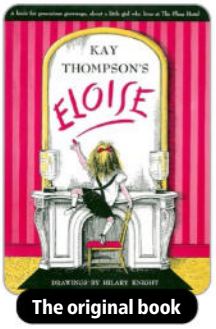
GAINING POPULARITY
In 2008, Eloise was the 999th most common name for babies born in the US, but by 2024 it had risen to 64th place.

Mae Schenk (left) and Ryan Reynolds

Live-action *Eloise* in the works

A new film based on one of the most well-known children's books is being developed by Netflix. The company recently announced it is adapting *Eloise*, by Kay Thompson, into a live-action movie with an all-new story that will star Ryan Reynolds as a villain.

As fans of the book know, Eloise is an imaginative and sneaky 6-year-old who lives at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. The first *Eloise* book was published in 1955 and was illustrated by Hilary Knight. The pair followed up those books with *Eloise in Paris* (1957), *Eloise at Christmastime* (1958), and *Eloise in Moscow* (1959). Two other Eloise books were published more recently. In 1956, an *Eloise* play aired on TV, and over the years, there have been live-action and animated *Eloise* films and an animated TV series.



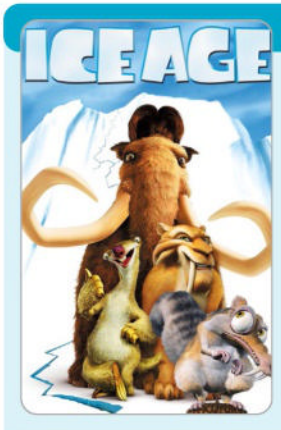
The original book

The new movie was written by Amy Sherman-Palladino (creator of *Gilmore Girls* and *Bunheads*) who will also direct it. Reynolds' production company, Maximum Effort, is helping to make the film. Hannah Minghella, who is the head of feature animation and family film at Netflix, said Reynolds and Sherman-Palladino share Eloise's "signature mischief and charm." The plot of the film has not been revealed, but Minghella called it "bold, hilarious, and heartfelt."

Mae Schenk, who is from Oklahoma, has been cast as Eloise. Maximum Effort's co-presidents of production Ashley Fox and Johnny Pariseau said she has "the spark, the wit, and just the right amount of mischief" for the role.

Production was set to begin last month. A release date has not yet been announced.

READER RECOMMENDS



Ice Age *PG (Disney+ or rent on other platforms)*

"I like the *Ice Age* films because they have humor and a bit of adventure. There are five in the series, and each one has the same main characters: Sid the sloth, Manny the mammoth, and Diego, a saber-toothed tiger. They usually go on long, dangerous journeys together. In the first film, Sid and Manny meet after getting separated from other animals during a migration. The pair find a human baby and want to return it to its home. They meet Diego, who offers to help, but he is secretly trying to bring the baby to his pack." London, 11, Montana

Do you have a film or TV show to recommend to other kids? Send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

THIS WEEK'S WATCH LIST

Merv
(Prime Video)

This new film is a comedy about a couple, Anna and Russ, and their dog, Merv. When the pair break up, Merv becomes heartbroken, so Russ takes him to Florida to boost his mood. After Anna shows up, Merv starts getting better—and Russ and Anna's relationship changes, too.

iHeartRadio Jingle Ball
(Hulu) (Disney+)

Each year, the iHeartRadio Jingle Ball Tour brings prominent musical artists to cities across the US. Fans can watch some of the performances from home in this TV special. The lineup includes Ed Sheeran, Conan Gray, Reneé Rapp, Laufey, and a sing-along moment from *KPop Demon Hunters*.

Born to Be Wild
(Apple TV+)

Young endangered animals being raised by conservation groups are the subject of this six-part documentary. It follows the challenges and triumphs of the animals, including cheetah cubs, an elephant calf, and rescued penguins, as they prepare to return to the wild.

LAURA FCKEL; GETTY IMAGES (2); COURTESY OF PUBLISHER; DISNEY; WILSON WEBB/PRIME; APPLE TV+; ON LEFT PAGE: PARAMOUNT PICTURES/VIACOM INTERNATIONAL INC.; GETTY IMAGES; COLUMBIA PICTURES

Kirby Air Riders

A racing game for Kirby fans

Kirby Air Riders is a new arcade racing game. It was recently released for the Nintendo Switch 2 and is a sequel to Kirby Air Ride from 2003.

The vehicles in the game are hovercrafts known as Air Rider Machines, and they help set Kirby Air Riders apart from other racing games like the ones in the Mario Kart franchise. The vehicles move forward automatically, so all you have to focus on is drifting (turning), timing speed boosts, and bumping rivals off the track. There are more than 25 Air Rider Machines, all of which have different features, such as how fast they go or how easy they are to control.

Air Riders has a total of 27 tracks and more than 20 playable characters, including series regulars Meta Knight and King Dedede. There are also four Kirbys, each in a different color, including classic pink. All of the game's characters have their own racing style, talents, and special ability. Blue Kirby, for example, can turn into a giant rolling snowball that wipes out other racers, while Chef Kawasaki uses a spicy curry to sets other racers' vehicles on fire. In a change from most Kirby games, every racer, not just Kirby, can inhale and copy certain abilities.

Kirby

Kirby Air Riders isn't always about racing. Its City Trial mode drops four players (or up to 16 if you're playing online) onto an island, where you zoom around and collect items to make your vehicle more powerful. Then you race or battle in a mini-game. Road Trip mode, for people playing solo, has you traveling around the game world to get vehicles and complete challenges, while also finding out more about Kirby and his friends.

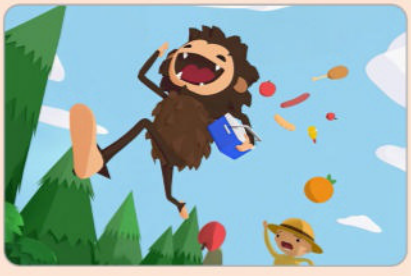
PODCAST OF THE WEEK

CHOPCHOP PODCAST

Major podcast platforms

This show is made by a nonprofit that encourages kids and families to cook and enjoy healthy food together. In each episode, the hosts explore a single food-related topic, such as sandwiches or tomatoes. They also give listeners a recipe or activity to try, like making holiday pies.

GAME OF THE WEEK



SNEAKY SASQUATCH

Apple App Store

Calima, a 9-year-old reader of *The Week Junior*, recommended this mobile adventure game, which was inspired by the forests of Squamish, British Columbia. You play as a mischievous Sasquatch who explores an open world filled with activities such as golfing, fishing, and bus driving.

WEBSITE OF THE WEEK

GETTY MUSEUM COLLECTION

getty.edu/art/collection

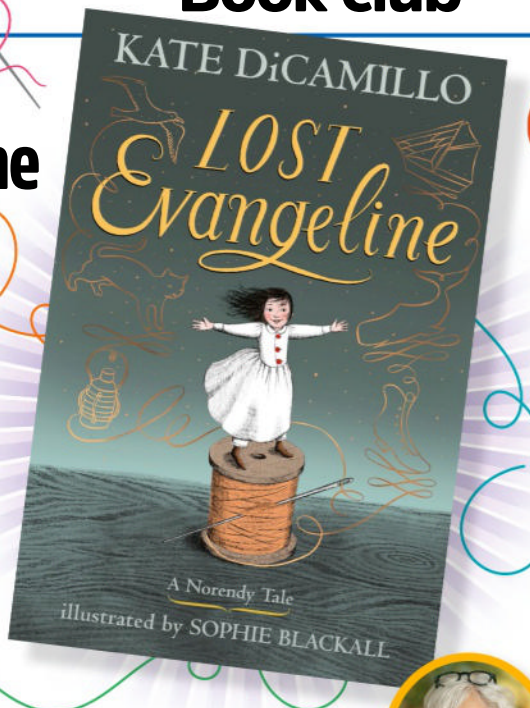
The famous Getty Museum in California has an online collection that allows you to explore thousands of artworks from home. You can download many of the images for free and use them in projects. Highlights include Claude Monet's still lifes and Vincent van Gogh's *Irises* (below).

NINTENDO (2); CHOPCHOP PODCAST; APPLE INC.; VINCENT VAN GOGH/COURTESY OF THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

BOOK OF THE WEEK

Lost Evangeline

Written by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Sophie Blackall (Candlewick)



Set in the imaginary land of Norendy, this fairy tale focuses on a tiny girl and a cobbler (shoemaker). The cobbler, who has yearned to be a father and sail the seas, discovers a miniature child in a boot he's repairing. At long last, he has a daughter! He names her Evangeline after a famous boat that has sailed around the world twice. The cobbler and Evangeline bond and sing about their desire to explore the world. Unfortunately, the shoemaker's wife doesn't share his joy about Evangeline. She believes the girl has filled her husband's head with useless fantasies. For some gold, she sells Evangeline. The cobbler realizes he must go to sea to find her. Meanwhile, Evangeline escapes from where she has been taken. She sets out with a curious cat to locate her father. Along the way, she encounters Stumphaulf, an evil entertainer who wants to exploit her as the "World's Smallest Songstress." Will the teeny lantern made by the shoemaker be enough to light Evangeline's way back to the cobbler, or will she remain lost? The folk art–inspired illustrations perfectly capture the separated pair's longing for togetherness and the power of following your dreams. *Ages 8 and up*

ASK THE AUTHOR

Kate DiCamillo

We spoke to the author of the Book of the Week.

What inspired this book?
I carried the idea for this story around with me for more than 15 years. I kept trying to make the story work, but it didn't come together until I had the idea to have the father be a shoemaker. So this book is a testament to not giving up on an idea!

How would you describe Evangeline?
Brave, imaginative, and filled with wonder.

What do you hope kids take from the story?
You can still be fearless in the world, no matter your size. Being small does not preclude someone from being brave.

Favorite place to write?
I am not one of those people who can write anywhere. I have to be at my desk.

What do you enjoy in your spare time?
Reading is one of my primary pleasures.

READER RECOMMENDS

Snoop *by Gordon Korman*

"On a ski trip, Carter is so absorbed by social media that he doesn't see his brother skiing uncontrollably toward him. Carter ends up breaking both of his legs. While recovering, he attends school virtually and starts watching his town's police cameras. After he watches them more, he starts to see some strange things. Can Carter figure out what is happening? Read to find out!" Levi, 11, California

Do you have a book to recommend? Send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

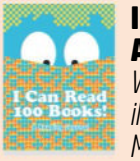
4 journals for logging the books you read

Creating a list of the titles you enjoy may inspire you to keep turning the pages.

Clever Fox Reading Journal

(Clever Fox)

This leather journal has space for you to complete up to 55 book reviews. The formatted pages allow you to give each book a star rating, track how long it took you to read it, and write down the story's highlights. It comes with stickers that you can add to your reviews. *Ages 8 and up*



I Can Read 100 Books! A Reading Journal

Written by McWu Store, illustrated by Corina Wu McFaden (Self-published)

If your goal is to read 100 books in 2026, this journal will help you do it! After you read five books, you'll earn a bookmark you can color. The pages also leave room for doodling, and you can write when you started and completed your challenge on the book's spine. *Ages 6–10*

My Reading Log: A Book Review Journal for Kids

(Caterpillar Curl)

This journal helps you organize monthly reading lists and challenges you to add variety to the types of books you read. It provides space for you to write 56 book reviews and encourages you to list the main characters, summarize the plot, and explain what you liked and didn't like about each story. *Ages 7–12*

Reading Log Book Review Journal

(Aunt Meg and Me Journals)

Color in the illustrations on this journal's book review pages and circle whether you thought a book was "awesome," "okay," or "not my favorite." The reviews also prompt you to note where the story takes place, how long it took you to finish the book, and why you do or don't recommend it. *Ages 7–12*

BOOKS: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS; AUTHOR: COURTESY OF KATE DICAMILLO; GETTY IMAGES

SUNNY DAY The summer solstice is the longest day of the year, meaning it has the most sunlight. The date in 2026 will be June 21.

Enjoy the winter solstice

Adopt new family traditions on December 21, the shortest day of the year.

Winter will officially begin on December 21, which is the winter solstice. That is the shortest day—and longest night—of the year for people living in the northern hemisphere (the half of Earth above the equator). But the winter solstice also means that the days will start to have more sunlight after that, which is a great reason to celebrate. Here are some activities to try.

Learn some history

Ancient civilizations likely celebrated the winter solstice to mark the return of longer days and more sunlight. Some monuments related to the solstice that were built thousands of years ago are still standing today. These include Stonehenge in England (a ring of giant stones that align with the Sun's rays on the winter solstice), Newgrange in Ireland, and Maeshowe in Scotland. You can find books about them at your library or ask an adult to help you search for information and photos online.

Make a dried fruit garland for wild birds.

Watch the Sun

December 21 is an ideal day to watch the sunrise or sunset, since you won't have to get up too early or stay up late. The time will be different depending on what part of the country you live in. You can look up the times for your city or town at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Solstice. Then decide with your family where you'll watch. Make it festive with blankets and warm drinks.

Decorate a yule tree

Decorating a tree outside with food for birds is a popular winter solstice ritual. Try making garlands out of dried or fresh orange slices to hang on the tree, or create mini bird feeders by covering pine cones with peanut butter and rolling them in bird seed before hanging them.

Have a candlelit feast

Many traditional solstice celebrations use candles as a tribute to the lighter days to come. Ask an adult to bring out some candles and light them with you. Then gather around the table and have a candlelit dinner.

Set goals

Some people use the winter solstice as a time to reflect on the past year and create goals for next year. Your candlelit feast is a good time to discuss what each family member hopes to accomplish next year. Or you can write down your thoughts and hopes in a journal.

Cozy comforts

Hygge is a Danish tradition centered on creating coziness and contentment in winter. Here are a few ways to practice it.

Get comfortable Part of hygge is indulging in simple pleasures that achieve a warm, relaxing environment. Put on fuzzy socks, enjoy a cup of cocoa, and cuddle with family on the sofa.

Think about light A significant part of practicing hygge is using soft light at home on long winter evenings. Switch on table lamps instead of bright overhead lights.

Do a puzzle Completing jigsaw puzzles can reduce stress and boost problem-solving skills. Set one up on a desk or table and try to complete a few pieces each day with family members.

CAKE FLAVOR
Black forest cake—made of chocolate, cherries, and cream—is named for the Black Forest region of Germany.

Make a black forest smoothie

Ingredients

- ½ cup milk or milk alternative
- 1 cup frozen cherries
- Handful baby spinach
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt or dairy-free yogurt
- 4 to 6 ice cubes
- Honey, to taste

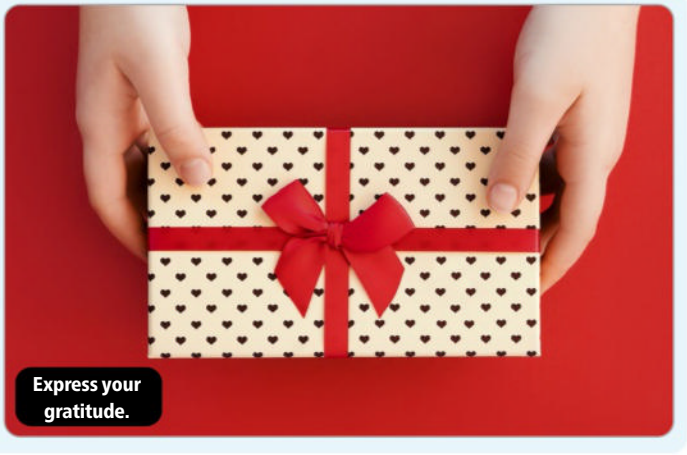
Instructions

1. Combine the milk, cherries, spinach, cocoa powder, yogurt, and ice cubes in a blender. Puree ingredients until smooth.
2. Taste and add 1 to 2 tablespoons of honey to sweeten, if desired, then stir. Makes 1 smoothie.

WARNING!
Ask an adult's permission before using the blender.

LIFE HACK RECEIVE A GIFT GRACEFULLY

With the holidays approaching, you may be lucky enough to receive gifts from family or friends. It's important to let them know how much you appreciate their presents. After you open a gift, say thank you right away and then say something specific you like about it. For example, maybe you love the color of a shirt or really needed a new basketball because yours is worn out. There may be times you feel disappointed in a gift. Still, try to respond in the spirit of the gift without lying. You could say something like, "Wow! What a gift!" or "Thank you so much for thinking of me." Finally, even if you said thank you in person, it's polite to follow up with a written thank-you note.



Express your gratitude.

ERICA CLARK FOR STONE KITCHEN CREATIVE; GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

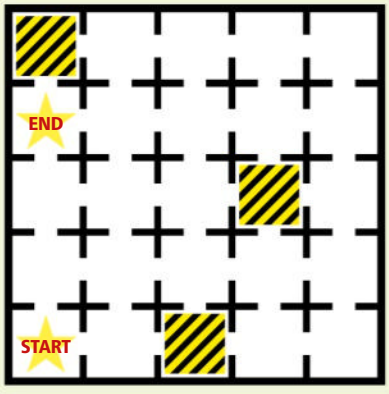
Word ladder

To change the word COIN into the word TOSS, use each clue to fill in a word that is only one letter different from the word before it. If you get stuck, try solving from the bottom up.

	C	O	I	N
Place where a beard grows ▶				
Word following potato or chocolate ▶				
Cut into small pieces ▶				
Hangout for chickens ▶				
Makes noise like a happy dove ▶				
A list of reasons against doing something ▶				
Thousands and thousands of pounds ▶				
	T	O	S	S

DO NOT ENTER

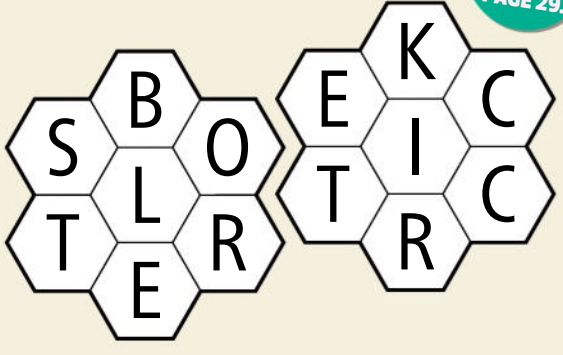
Draw one continuous path from START to END that goes through every box except the ones containing obstacles. Your path may not cross itself, and there is only one solution.



STEPPING STONES

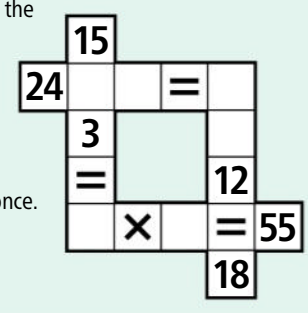
ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 29.

Each figure hides the seven-letter name of a creature with antennae. To find each one, start anywhere and move in an unbroken path through letters that share a border (no jumping!), using each letter once. (NEED A HINT? Check the bottom of the page.)



Crossmath

Fill each empty box with a number or a mathematical symbol (+, −, ×, or ÷) to complete the equations across and down. A symbol can be used more than once.



Spot the difference

These two pictures of a mug of hot chocolate appear to be the same, but take a closer look. There are actually five differences. Can you see them?

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

Stepping stones hint: The second answer starts with the lower C.

Grumpy art guides are a hit

Do you get bored listening to friendly guides drone on about art? Now a German museum is offering tours with its "Grumpy Guide," who insults visitors while they explore the galleries. Groups are led by the grouchy Joseph Langelinck, a fictional character created by performer Carl Brandi. He scolds guests if they use their phones, wags his finger in their faces, and mocks them for knowing less about the art than he does. Amazingly, these tours have been selling out. They're an "emotional ride," said Brandi.

Sleepover with a tiny horse

At a vacation rental in the UK, visitors can share their room with a miniature Shetland pony named Basil. The bedroom is inside a barn and shares a wall with Basil's stable. Its owner put a doorway between the two areas to give guests a chance to hang out with the 12-year-old horse. The ad for Basil's Barn warns people that they may experience noises and smells, but guests don't seem to mind. "Everyone who stays loves it," said owner Brittany Sparham. "It works out well for Basil, too, as he always has company."

A drink that's minty fresh

The California food store Erewhon has teamed up with dental brand Boka to launch an unusual smoothie flavor. Inspired by one of Boka's toothpastes, the green drink is supposed to give you the same "clean, fresh feeling" you get after brushing your teeth. Nathan Day of Erewhon said that with its blend of mint, green tea, coconut, and fruit, the drink makes people feel like they're at a health spa. Reviews have been mixed—although one person said it's "super refreshing," another called it "nasty."

Chickens get their yoga on

Why did the chicken cross the road? If it were in Tampa, Florida, it may have been on its way to yoga class. Once a month, chickens wearing tiny diapers cluck and flap around a studio while 50 humans practice their poses. Wild chickens are commonly found in the city, and a local animal sanctuary has started bringing some of its rescued birds to special "chicken yoga" events. The group's leader said the birds enjoy the attention, while their antics make the yogis smile. Is this real, or are we stretching the truth?*

*Real! The class features birds from the Ybor Chicken Society, often festively dressed. "Yoga can be so ridiculously serious," said teacher Colleen McHenry, but "here we are doing it with chickens who are wearing overalls."

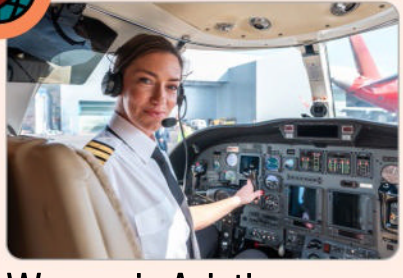
ALAMY; AIRBNB SCREENSHOT (2); EREWHON; HOTEL HAYA; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

Editor's note

Every December, I have the honor of being one of the judges of our Winter Cover Contest (p14). It's an exciting but challenging task! This year more than 2,000 children sent in submissions, and we carefully considered each one before choosing 10 finalists and ultimately two runners-up and one grand prize winner. Our warmest congratulations to Elle, whose beautiful drawing of a polar bear looking at the night sky earned the top honor. Congratulations, also, to Seth, Victoria, and all the finalists who submitted such impressive work. And thank you to every child who entered and made the contest so special. I also offer my deepest thanks to fellow judges Vanessa Brantley-Newton, Whitney Gardner, Chris Raschka, and Dean Abatemarco for sharing their expertise as we made such a difficult decision. Happy winter, everyone!

Andrea Barbalich
Editorial Director

CHARITY OF THE WEEK



Women in Aviation International

This organization is the largest nonprofit group to envision a world where the sky is open to all to pursue aviation and aerospace careers. The group works to increase the number of females in the aviation industry by providing them with scholarships, networking opportunities, and mentoring. It has about 20,000 members in 120 countries. Find out more at wai.org.

Collecting books for a cause

Sophia, 15, California

"I hosted a book drive at a local elementary school to donate books and bookmarks to children affected by the Altadena wildfires. I wanted to help by donating used but high-quality books to them. My goal was to collect 100 books, but I quickly realized that was far too low! The families and students were extremely generous, and I believe we were able to donate about 400 books. This just shows that anyone, no matter their age, can help other people and make a positive impact on the world."

Have you done something interesting or raised money for a cause you care about? Whatever you're up to, we want to hear about it at *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

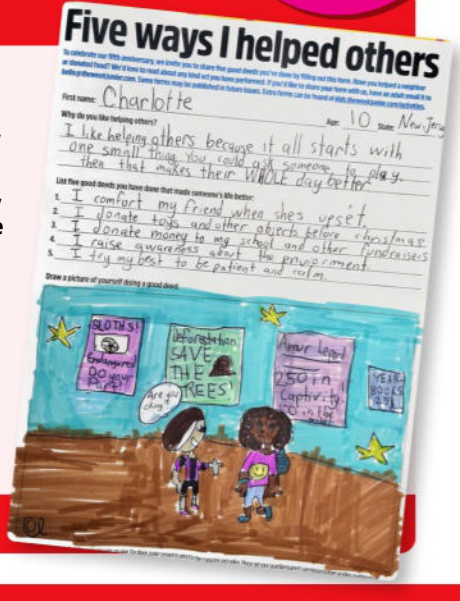
JOKE OF THE WEEK

Why don't scallops and clams ever like to share?

They're two shellfish.

Your five good deeds

To celebrate *The Week Junior*'s fifth anniversary in 2025, we called on readers to tell us about five good deeds they've done. Charlotte, a 10-year-old from New Jersey, sent us the form shown at right. Her good deeds include donating toys, comforting her upset friend, and raising awareness about the environment. We've enjoyed reading every form we have received this year. Thank you for sending them to us! If you have helped a neighbor or performed a kind act and want to write about it, you can fill out the form as a keepsake. Go to kids.theweekjunior.com/activities to download it.



Five ways I helped others

First name: Charlotte Age: 10 State: New Jersey

Why do you like helping others?
I like helping others because it all starts with one small thing you could ask someone to play. then that makes their WHOLE day better

List five good deeds you have done that made someone's life better:
1. I comfort my friend when shes upset.
2. I donate toys and other objects before christmas
3. I donate money to my school and other fundraisers
4. I raise awareness about the environment
5. I try my best to be patient and calm.

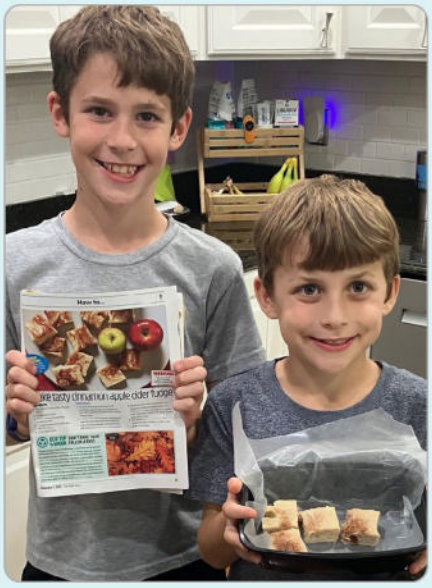
Draw a picture of yourself doing a good deed.

THE WEEK Junior IT'S YOUR TURN Email your news, views, and photos to *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

Your turn

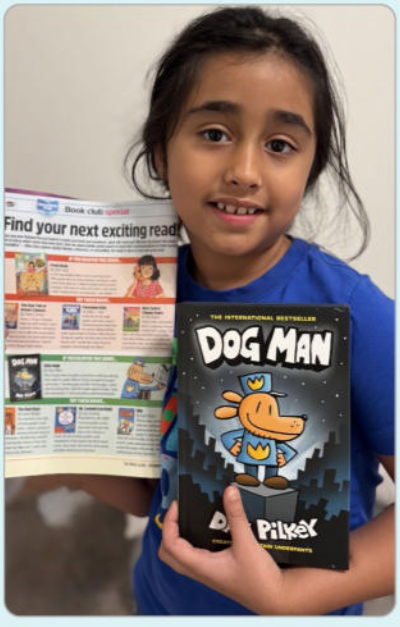
YOUR PHOTOS

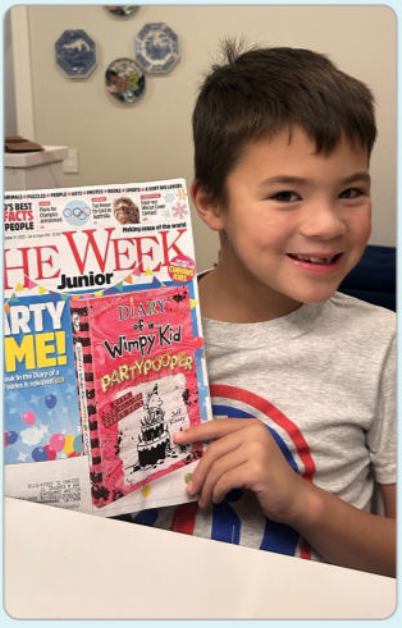
We'd love to see pictures you've taken or pictures with you in them! Have an adult email them to us at *hello@theweekjunior.com*, along with anything you would like us to know about what's happening in the photo.



"We made the apple cider fudge recipe, and it was delicious!" Matthew, 9, and Owen, 7, North Carolina

"I love *Dog Man*, and I even watched the *Dog Man* movie!" Sayeisha, 7, Texas





"I look forward to *The Week Junior* every week! My favorite is the sports section." William, 7, Illinois

Teacher OF THE WEEK

Teacher's Name: **Ms. Jennison Lee**

School: **Kent Place School**

"Ms. Lee is the best teacher. She is an awesome English Language Arts teacher and lets us write fun stories as assignments. Ms. Lee put up fairy lights so our classroom shines. During morning meetings, we play fun games to greet each other. She always helps without hesitating. Those are only a few reasons why Ms. Lee is the best teacher ever!"

Mira, 9, New Jersey

Nominate your teacher for Teacher of the Week! Send your reason for the nomination, a photo of your teacher, and your school's name and address to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

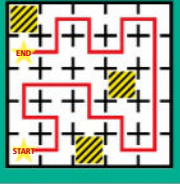
Puzzle answers (from page 26)

Word ladder

COIN
CHIN
CHIP
CHOP
COOP
COOS
CONS
TONS
TOSS

Stepping stones

lobster, cricket



						15
24	÷	4	=	6		
3				+		
=				12		
5	×	11	=	55		
				18		

Quiz answers (from page 30) **1** b) Crabs **2** False. It was published in 1955. **3** Cloud Dancer **4** c) 100 million **5** a) Bad Bunny **6** False. They have high blood pressure. **7** The winter solstice **8** a) Helen Mirren **9** c) Spicy curry **10** True **11** UNICEF **12** b) Ice Spice **13** True **14** Boot **15** b) Grumpy

We want to hear from you! To have your letters, photos, nominations, recommendations, or ideas considered for inclusion in the magazine, please include your first name, age, and state with your submission. By emailing your submission to us, you give *The Week Junior* consent to publish it in the magazine and online. Please get your parent/guardian's permission before sending anything to us.

How much of this week's news can you remember?

1 A gray wolf surprised experts by opening a trap set for what other animals?

a) Fish b) Crabs c) Mice

a☐ b☐ c☐

2 True or false? The first *Eloise* book was published in 1985.

True☐ False☐

3 What is Pantone's color of the year for 2026 called?

4 In about 150 BCE, approximately how many people lived in the Roman Empire?

a) 1 million b) 10 million c) 100 million

a☐ b☐ c☐

5 Globally, who was the most streamed artist on Spotify this year?

a) Bad Bunny

b) Morgan Wallen

c) Taylor Swift

a☐ b☐ c☐

6 True or false? Because of their long necks, giraffes have low blood pressure.

True☐ False☐

7 What is the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere called?

8 Which of these actresses will be honored with the 2026 Cecil B. DeMille Award at the Golden Globes?

a) Helen Mirren

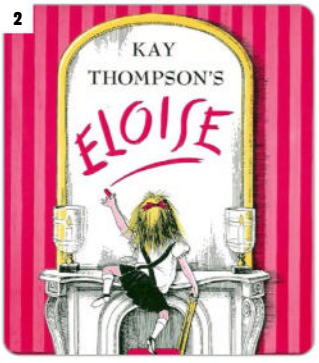
b) Judi Dench

c) Vanessa Redgrave

a☐ b☐ c☐

9

2



1

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 29.

10

5

9 In the video game Kirby Air Riders, what does Chef Kawasaki use to set other racers' vehicles on fire?

a) Fire flour

b) Hot sauce

c) Spicy curry

a☐ b☐ c☐

10 True or false? Men's soccer team Inter Miami recently won its first MLS Cup.

True☐ False☐

11 Poet Amanda Gorman was recently named an ambassador for what humanitarian organization?

12 Which musical artist has a part in the new film *The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants*?

a) Olivia Rodrigo

b) Ice Spice

c) Sabrina Carpenter

a☐ b☐ c☐

13 True or false? Chips about the size of a grain of rice were implanted in patients' eyes to help them see.

True☐ False☐

14 In the book *Lost Evangeline*, a miniature child is discovered in what object?

15 A German museum uses which word to describe its special new tour guide?

a) Dopey

b) Grumpy

c) Sleepy

a☐ b☐ c☐

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COURTESY OF PUBLISHER; GETTY IMAGES (2); SPOTIFY; NINTENDO

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THE WEEK Junior
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SECRETS OF THE PENGUINS
New nature series explores the birds' brave and bold behavior p20
Stepping into HISTORY
Find out about the first NASA astronauts who walked on the Moon p12
DID YOU KNOW?
The first Moon landing took place on July 20, 1969.
Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the lunar surface.
Their world-famous mission was called Apollo 11.

Smart, fun, educational. Each week, *The Week Junior* presents 32 colorful pages full of thought-provoking articles, eye-catching photos, and big ideas to get kids ages 8–14 reading! There's something to delight and inspire every child—from sports and science to nature and arts—plus how-to craft projects, recipes, and puzzles. Perfect for the holidays or anytime you want to delight a child you love.

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THE GREAT AMERICAN BIRTHDAY QUILT

WILLIAMSBURG 250

Quilt a Piece of *History*

America turns 250 in 2026! Celebrate this milestone by designing your own quilt block for **The Great American Birthday Quilt** — a one-of-a-kind tribute made by people across the nation.

Create a block that celebrates what you love most about America — favorite places, inspiring people, or unforgettable moments. No sewing skills needed! Your design can be **sewn, glued, or crafted** with any fabric and decorations you like.

Each block will become part of a giant quilt that tells **America's story — made by all of us.**

How to Make *Your* Quilt Block

Follow these simple steps:

1

CHOOSE YOUR INSPIRATION

- Think of something that represents America to you — a person, place, quote, or memory.

2

CREATE YOUR BLOCK (Materials & Size)

- Use any fabric and materials you like — buttons, ribbon, sequins, even feathers!
- Sizes: 12×12, 12×14, 16×16, or 16×20 inches.
- You can sew it or glue it — your choice.

3

SEND IT IN

- Mail your block by **February 28, 2026** to:

Visit Williamsburg
Attn: Selena Coles
421 North Boundary Street
Williamsburg, VA 23185

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